

Fall Turkey Harvest Report 2003

By Brian Dhuey and Keith Warnke

Abstract

The 2003 fall turkey season ran for 30 days, from 11 October through 9 November. Past modern fall hunts have ranged from 7-28 days. The number of permits available increased from 74,650 in 2002 to 76,950 in 2003. Permitted hunters harvested 12,554 turkeys for a success rate of 15.9%. This rate represents an increase in success from the fall hunt of 2002 when 14.5% of permit holders killed a bird. Factors that may have affected success rate include the statewide bow hunt, the Antlerless Only deer hunt, and the special CWD deer hunt. Forty-three turkey management zones and the Fort McCoy zone were open to hunting in the fall of 2003. Females comprised 59% of the turkey harvest.

Methods

Harvest information was obtained through mandatory registration of harvested turkeys. Turkey registration stations were paid either \$35 for the season or 35¢ per bird registered, depending on which amount was greater at each station. Registrars were required to collect the zone, date of kill, sex and age of each turkey killed. Registration records were entered into the DNR UNIX production server by regional personnel and summarized using the Statistical Analysis System (SAS).

Results

Hunting Zones

Forty-three turkey management zones and Fort McCoy (Figure 1) were open to fall hunting in 2003. State Parks are not open to fall turkey hunting like many of them are for spring. This marks the second year that all non-park turkey zones in the state are open for both spring and fall hunting.

Permit Levels

Permit levels vary depending on the spring hunting success, amount of timber, hunter interference, and turkey population densities and distributions within zones. With turkey brood production about average for most of the state in 2003, and an increase in spring turkey permit success in 2003, the WDNR Wild Turkey Committee raised permit levels for the 2003 fall season (Table 1).

Permit Selection

All applicants were required to pay a \$3 fee for an application. Preference of permits was given first to landowners (up to 30% of permits available), followed by residents who applied for but did not receive a permit in the fall of 2002, other residents, and finally non-residents. Applications were randomly selected, but first choice zones of all applicants within each preference category were issued available permits before second, third, fourth, etc. choices were filled.

Harvest and Success Rates

Fall turkey hunters harvested 12,554 turkeys in the fall of 2003. This level of success represents an increase of 15% from the 2002 fall kill of 10,860 turkeys. Data on the historical fall turkey harvests are summarized in Table 2 and Figure 2.

The fall hunter's success rate (percent of permit holders that harvested a turkey) increased from 14.5% in 2002 to 15.9% in 2003. Eight zones had a success rate of 20% or greater and 2 zones had a success rate of less than 10% (Table1). As is normal, the statewide archery deer hunt overlapped the entire fall turkey season, as well as 47 deer units that had an Antlerless Only deer hunt which overlapped 4 days of the fall turkey season. Also the southern 1/3 of the state had a special CWD gun deer hunt which overlapped 4-11 days of the fall turkey season. All hunters are required to wear blaze orange during these deer seasons, except archery, which probably had the effect of eliminating days of turkey hunting. Another factor that may have an effect on success rates is availability of permits. As permits become more common, they may fall into the hands of the less devoted turkey hunter, primarily bow hunters who may apply for a turkey permit on the off chance that one might walk under their tree stand while bow hunting. These less dedicated hunters may never go out with the sole purpose of hunting turkeys. Hunter success rates are uncorrected for non-active hunters, actual success rates are higher. Between 1989 and 2002, an average of 75% of fall permit holders were active hunters.

Age and Sex Ratios

The number of adult turkeys harvested (58%) was almost the same as in 2002 (57%). Females comprised 59% of the harvest while males accounted for 39%, and unrecorded was 1%. Adult females comprised 32% of the fall harvest, juvenile hens 28%, gobblers 26%, jakes 13%, and unknowns 1%. These numbers are similar to 2002 harvest figures (33% adult females, 27% juvenile hens, 25% gobblers, and 14% jakes).

Adults are generally believed to be less vulnerable to fall hunting than juveniles, particularly for hens. Possible explanations for the high adult hen harvest and relatively low juvenile kill could be caused by registration station attendants confusing jakes as adult hens, or the hunting methods and selectivity of Wisconsin hunters toward adults. There are probable prestige biases at work also, where hunters are reluctant to admit to killing a juvenile.

Accidents

There were two fall turkey hunting accidents reported in 2003. Both accidents were a result of the shooter's failure to properly identify the target. Since fall hunting of turkeys began in 1989 there have been 23 non-fatal hunting accidents with an average of 1.5 per year.

Table 1. The turkey zone open to fall hunting, turkey kill by age and sex, permits issued, and permit success rate for 2003.

Zone	Toms	Jakes	Hens	Juvenile Hens	Unknowns	Total Harvest	Permits Issued	% Permit Success
1	36	21	70	69	0	196	1,199	16.3%
2	49	22	71	90	0	232	1,800	12.9%
3	137	84	168	165	0	554	4,515	12.3%
4	35	26	38	24	7	130	1,002	13.0%
5	72	41	106	66	0	285	2,601	11.0%
6	30	14	45	42	0	131	1,400	9.4%
7	88	45	117	103	0	353	2,803	12.6%
8	57	26	50	44	0	177	1,402	12.6%
9	62	38	115	102	0	317	1,501	21.1%
10	12	6	18	21	0	57	601	9.5%
11	50	37	79	110	22	298	2,003	14.9%
12	116	63	126	137	21	463	3,000	15.4%
13	49	13	55	42	0	159	1,201	13.2%
14	41	32	72	82	0	227	1,799	12.6%
15	84	62	131	114	0	391	2,705	14.5%
16	58	32	61	46	9	206	1,699	12.1%
17	152	79	140	145	1	517	3,602	14.4%
18	142	98	194	167	0	601	4,502	13.3%
19	114	49	159	89	1	412	2,201	18.7%
20	90	57	92	89	0	328	2,100	15.6%
21	226	115	369	318	1	1,029	4,805	21.4%
22	270	116	334	256	5	981	5,011	19.6%
23	248	104	267	292	7	918	6,807	13.5%
24	84	32	49	50	6	221	1,201	18.4%
25	52	22	41	33	4	152	1,005	15.1%
26	25	17	15	25	7	89	602	14.8%
27	16	7	20	13	8	64	400	16.0%
28	22	14	17	27	1	81	603	13.4%
29	5	1	2	1	1	10	100	10.0%
30	55	19	47	38	0	159	801	19.9%
31	15	11	10	6	1	43	300	14.3%
32	8	9	12	3	1	33	200	16.5%
33	120	54	134	74	4	386	1,801	21.4%
34	228	67	224	175	30	724	3,004	24.1%
35	30	16	37	26	0	109	601	18.1%
36	53	15	53	35	2	158	700	22.6%
37	149	40	166	88	0	443	2,801	15.8%
38	56	54	56	52	4	222	1,199	18.5%
39	43	14	46	67	0	170	1,250	13.6%
40	4	3	16	26	0	49	201	24.4%
41	33	17	38	32	0	120	704	17.0%
42	40	24	63	43	0	170	700	24.3%
43	25	18	29	18	0	90	399	22.6%
FM	28	7	22	42	0	99	N/A	N/A
Totals	3,309	1,641	3,974	3,487	143	12,554	78,831	15.9%

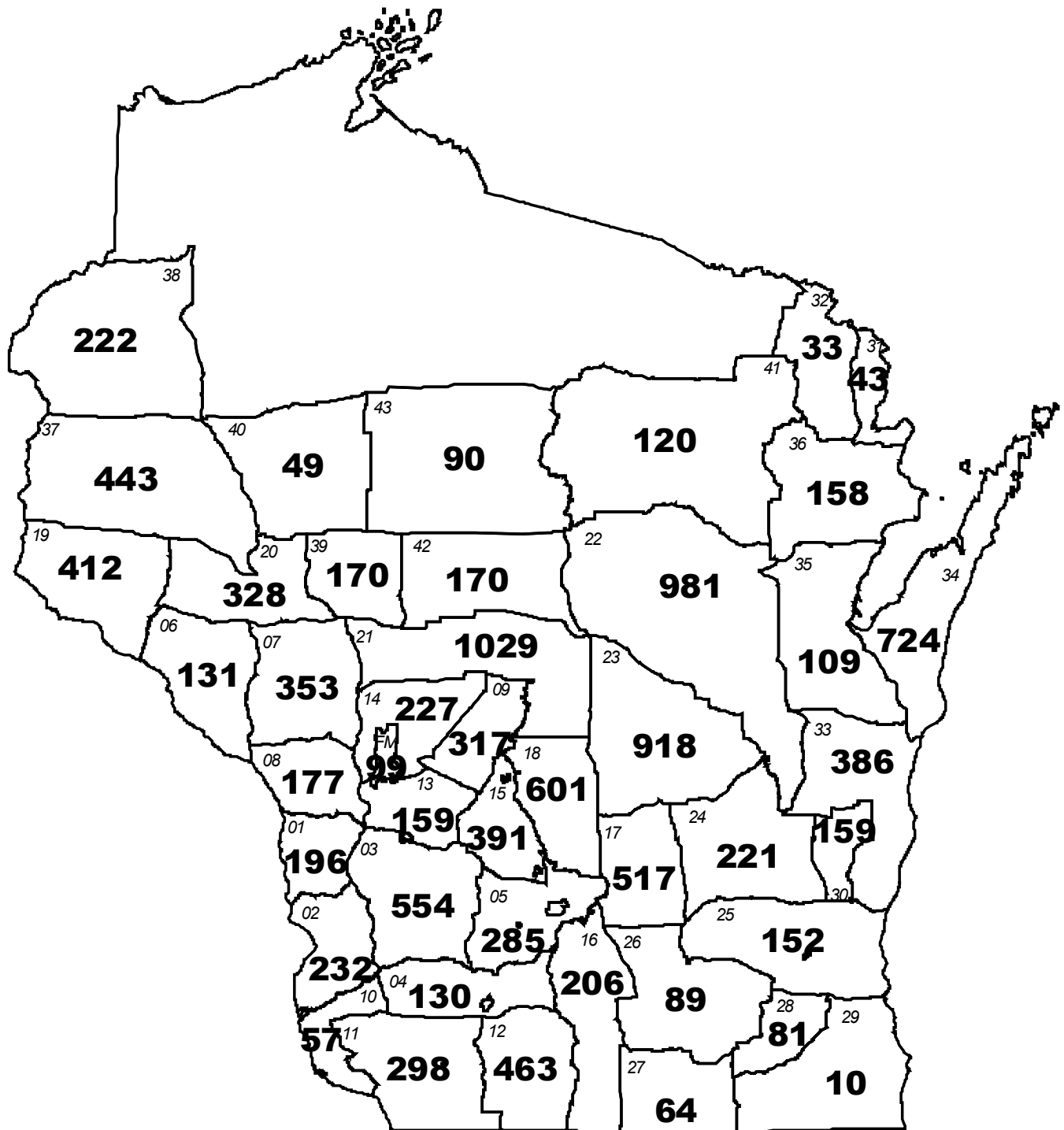


Figure 1. *Fall turkey harvest by zone, 2003.*

Table 2. *Historical number of permits issued, harvest, and permit success for fall turkey hunting, 1989-2003.*

Year	Permits Issued	Harvest	Permit Success
1989	7,260	1,570	21.6%
1990	12,465	3,433	27.5%
1991	16,668	2,904	17.4%
1992	24,997	5,024	20.1%
1993	31,449	5,625	17.9%
1994	17,889	3,896	21.8%
1995	28,555	6,241	21.9%
1996	30,779	6,305	20.5%
1997	32,569	6,004	18.4%
1998	41,131	8,845	21.5%
1999	55,479	10,825	19.5%
2000	69,566	11,263	16.2%
2001	71,601	11,029	15.4%
2002	75,040	10,860	14.5%
2003	78,831	12,554	15.9%

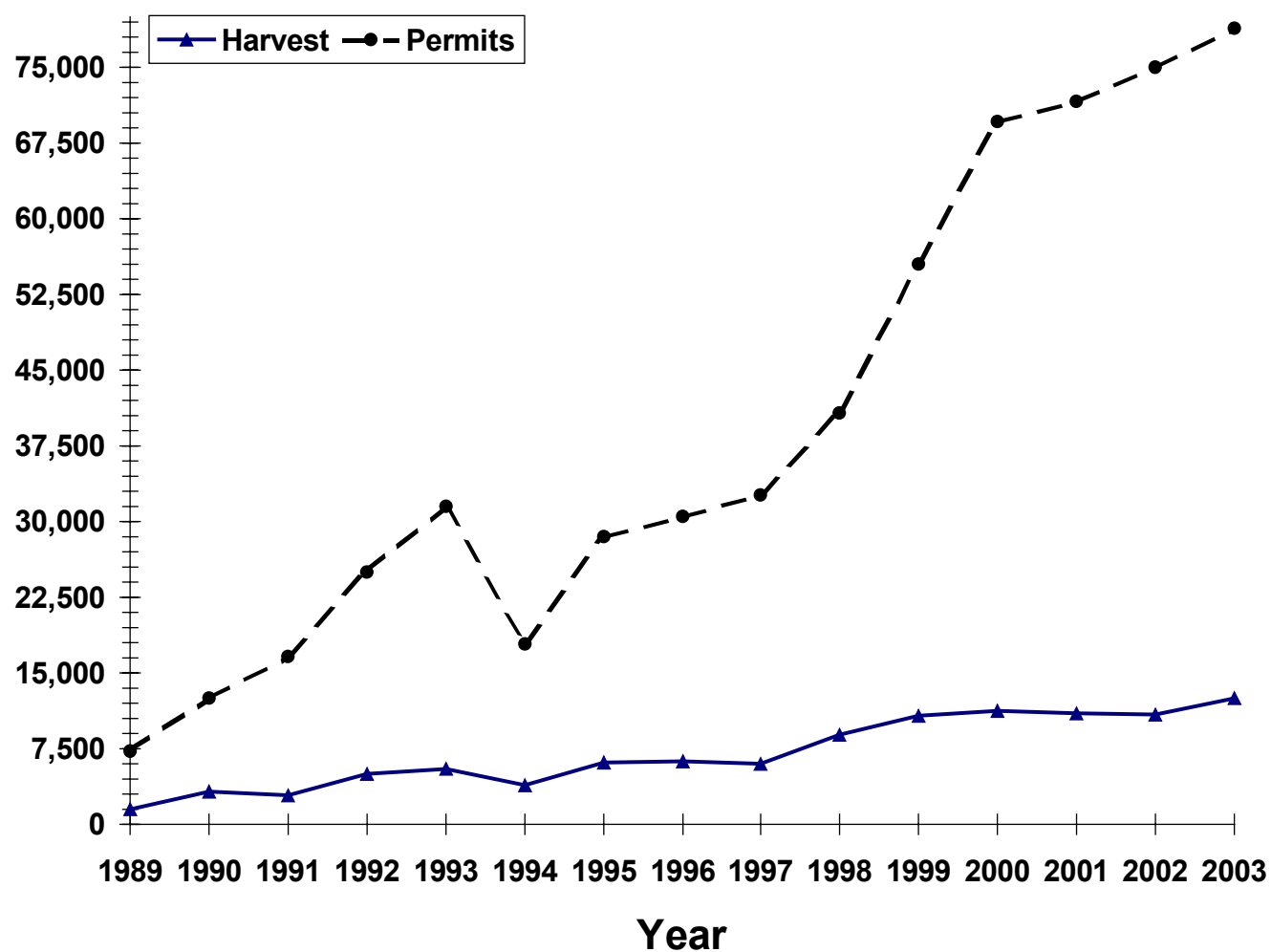


Figure 2. *Fall turkey permits issued, and harvest, 1989-2003.*